PREFACE
to *NARCISSUS*

[1] I wrote this Play at the age of eighteen, and refrained from showing it as long as I at all cared about my reputation as an Author. I finally felt bold enough to publish it, but I shall never feel so bold as to say anything about it. So that what is at issue here is not my play, but myself.

[2] I have to speak about myself in spite of my reluctance to do so; I either have to acknowledge the wrongs ascribed to me, or to vindicate myself. I realize that it will not be an even match. For I will be attacked with witticisms, and defend myself with nothing but arguments: but provided I convince my adversaries, I do not much care whether I persuade them; in striving to deserve my self-esteem, I have learned to do without the esteem of others, who, after all, for the most part do without mine. But while it does not matter to me whether I am thought of well or ill, it does matter to me that no one have the right to think ill of me, and it matters to the truth I have upheld that its defender not be justly accused of having lent it his assistance on a mere whim or out of vanity, without loving or knowing it.

[3] The side I chose in the question I was investigating some years ago did not fail to make me a host of adversaries,* who

* I am told that a number of people object to my calling my adversaries my adversaries, and I am quite prepared to believe it, in a century in which people no longer dare to call anything by its name. I also hear that everyone of my adversaries complains when I answer objections other than his own, that I am wasting my time fighting chimeras; which confirms something I had rather suspected, namely that they do not waste their time reading or listening to one another. I, on the other hand, thought it incumbent on me to take that trouble, *[960]* and I have read the numerous writings against me which they have published, from the first reply with which I was honored, to the four German sermons of which one begins more or less as follows: *My brethren, if Socrates were to return among us and to see the thriving state of the sciences in Europe; what am I saying, in Europe? in Germany; what am I saying, in Germany? in Saxony; what am I saying, in Saxony? in Leipzig; what am I saying, in Leipzig? in this University; then, struck with astonishment and filled with respect, Socrates would modestly take his place among our pupils and, humbly absorbing our teaching, he would, under our tutelage, soon be rid of the ignorance of which he so justifiably complained.* I read all this and made only a few replies. Perhaps that was still too many. But I am pleased that

perhaps cared more about the interests */960/* of men of letters than about the honor of literature. I had anticipated as much, and I rather suspected that their behavior in these circumstances would do more for my cause than would all my discourses. Indeed, they did not hide their astonishment and vexation that an Academy should so ill-advisedly have acted with integrity. In their effort to undermine the authority of its judgment, they did not spare it insults or even falsehoods.* Nor was I forgotten in their tirades. Some undertook to refute me directly: the wise could see how cogently, and the public how successfully they did so. Others, more skillful, knowing the danger of attacking established truths head-on, adroitly deflected attention on my person when it should have been focused exclusively on my arguments, and their accusations against me set off debates that caused my more serious accusations against them to be forgotten. */961/* They are, therefore, the ones who have to be answered once and for all.

[4] They contend that I do not believe a word of the truths I upheld, and that while I was proving one proposition, I continued to believe its opposite. That is tantamount to saying that I proved such outlandish things that people can claim I could have upheld them only in jest. What a fine tribute they thereby pay to the science that serves as the foundation of all the other sciences; and to see the art of reasoning so successfully used to

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these Gentlemen should have liked them enough to be jealous of those who were favored with them. As for the people who are shocked by the word *adversaries,* I will gladly give it up if they will kindly show me another with which to refer not only to all those who have attacked my sentiment either in writing or, more cautiously and safely, at gatherings of ladies and wits where they were sure I would not go to defend myself, but also to those who now pretend to believe that I have no adversaries, but who at first found my adversaries' replies irrefutable and who, once I had refuted them, blamed me for having done so because, according to them, I had not been attacked. Meanwhile I trust that they will permit me to call my adversaries my adversaries, for in spite of the politeness of my century, I am as crude as Philip's Macedonians.

* In the *Mercure* for August 1752 will be found a disclaimer by the Academy of Dijon of I know not what writing which its Author had falsely attributed to one of the members of that Academy.

prove absurdities, certainly leads one to believe that it is most helpful in the discovery of truth!

[5] They contend that I do not believe a word of the truths I upheld; that is evidently a new and convenient way of theirs to assail unassailable arguments, to refute the proofs even of Euclid, and all demonstrated truths in the universe. Now it seems to me that those who so rashly accuse me of speaking in contradiction with my thought, have, themselves, few scruples about speaking in contradiction with theirs: for, as I shall soon prove, they have surely not found anything in my Writings or in my conduct that could have given them this idea; and they must know that a man who speaks seriously must be thought to believe what he says, unless either his deeds or his discourses belie it; and even that is not always enough to be sure that he does not believe it.

[6] They may therefore proclaim as loudly as they please that when I came out against the sciences, I spoke in contradiction with my sentiment; I know of only one reply to a claim so rash and so devoid of proof or plausibility; it is short, vigorous, and I ask them to consider it delivered.

[7] They also contend that my conduct contradicts my principles, and they undoubtedly rely on this second charge to establish the first; for there are many people who can discover proofs for what is not [so]. Thus they will say that it is unbecoming for someone who writes music and poetry to denigrate the fine arts, and that literature, which I profess to despise, can, after all, be pursued in a thousand more praiseworthy ways than by writing Plays. This accusation, too, has to be answered. *[962]*

[8] First of all; even if it were strictly granted, I say that it would prove that I behave badly, but not that I fail to speak in good faith. If it were permissible to derive proofs about men's sentiments from their actions, we would have to say that the love of justice has been banished from all hearts, and that there is not a single Christian on earth. Show me men who always act in conformity with their maxims, and I will condemn my own. It is mankind's fate that reason shows us the goal, and the passions divert us from it. Hence even if it were true that I do

not act according to my principles, that, by itself alone, would not be reason enough to accuse me of speaking in contradiction with my sentiment, or to accuse my principles of falseness.

[9] But if I wished to concede the point, all I would have to do, in order to reconcile matters, is to contrast the [different] times [involved]. I have not always had the good fortune to think as I do now. For a long time seduced by the prejudices of my century, I took study to be the only occupation worthy of a wise man, I looked upon the sciences with nothing but respect, and upon the learned with nothing but admiration.* I did not understand that one can go astray while forever proving things, or do evil while forever talking about wisdom. Only after I had seen things from close up did I learn to assess them at their true worth; and although I had, in my inquiries, always found *glibness enough, not enough wisdom,* it took me much reflection, much observation, and much time to rid myself of my illusions about all this vain scientific pomp. It is not surprising that during those times of prejudice and error, when I held being an Author in such high regard, I occasionally aspired to be one myself. That is when I wrote the Poems and most of the other Pieces that have issued from my pen, and, among others, this little Play. It might be rather *[963]* harsh to reproach me now for these amusements of my youth, and it would, to say the least, be wrong to accuse me on their account of having contradicted principles I did not yet hold. I long ago ceased to set any stock whatsoever by any of these things; and to venture to offer them to the Public under these circumstances, after having had the sense to keep them this long, is to indicate clearly enough that I am equally indifferent to the praise and to the blame they may deserve; for I no longer think as did the Author whose work they are. They are illegitimate children one still fondles with pleasure while blushing to be their father, of

* Whenever I recall my former simplicity I cannot help laughing. In every book of Ethics or of Philosophy I read, I believed I saw the Author's soul and principles. I looked upon all these grave Writers as modest, wise, virtuous, irreproachable men. I entertained angelic notions about what it would be like to have dealings with them, and I would only have approached the house of anyone of them, as if it were a sanctuary. Finally I saw them; this childish prejudice vanished, and it is the only error of which they have cured me.

whom one takes one's final leave, and whom one sends off to seek their fortune without greatly worrying about what will become of them.

[10] But all this is to argue at excessive length on the basis of chimerical assumptions. If the accusation that I cultivate letters when I despise them is unfounded, then my defense against that accusation is unnecessary; for even if it were in fact true, it would not involve an inconsistency: that is what it remains for me to prove.

[11] To this end I will, as is my wont, follow the simple and easy method that suits the truth. I will once again set forth the problem, I will once again state my sentiment, and I will await to be shown how, in terms of this account, my deeds belie my speeches. My adversaries will, for their part, not be at a loss for a reply, since they have mastered the wonderful art of arguing pro and con on all manner of subjects. They will begin, as is their wont, by setting forth an altogether different question according to their fancy; they will have me resolve it to suit themselves: in order to attack me more easily they will have me arguing not in my own way, but in theirs; they will skillfully shift the Reader's eyes from the primary object and fix them to the right or to the left; they will fight a specter and claim to have defeated me: but I will have done what I must do, and I begin.

[12] "Science is good for nothing, and it never does anything but harm, because it is by its very nature bad. It is as inseparable from vice as ignorance is from virtue. All lettered peoples have at all times been corrupt; all ignorant peoples have been virtuous: in a word, only among the learned are there vices, only a man who knows nothing is virtuous. There is a way, then, *[964]* for us to become honest folk again: forthwith to banish science and the learned, burn our libraries, close our Academies, our Colleges, our Universities, and plunge back into the full barbarism of the first centuries."

[13] This much my adversaries have thoroughly refuted; but then I never said or thought a single word of any of it, and it is impossible to imagine anything more contrary to my system than this absurd doctrine they have the goodness to attribute to me.

Here is what I did say, and what has not been refuted.

[14] The issue was whether the restoration of the arts and sciences had contributed to the purification of our morals.

[15] By showing, as I did, that our morals were not purified,* the question was more or less resolved.

[16] But it implicitly raised another, more *[965]* general and more important question, about what must be the influence of the pursuit of the sciences on the morals of peoples under any circumstances. It is this question, of which the first is but a corollary, that I undertook to examine with care.

[17] I began with the facts, and showed that in all peoples of the world, morals have deteriorated in proportion as a taste for study and letters has spread among them.

[18] That was not all; for although it was impossible to deny that these things always occurred together, it was possible to deny that one brought about the other: I therefore endeavored to establish this necessary connection. I showed that the source of our errors on this point comes from our mistaking our vain and deceptive knowledge for the sovereign intelligence that sees the truth of all things at one glance. Science, taken

* When I said that our morals had been corrupted, I did not mean to say that our ancestors' morals were good, but only that ours were even worse. There are a thousand sources of corruption among men; and although the sciences may be the most profuse and rapid of them, they are far from being the only one. The destruction of the Roman Empire, the invasions by hosts of Barbarians, resulted in a mixing of all peoples that must inevitably have destroyed each one's morals and customs. The crusades, commerce, the discovery of the Indies, navigation, farflung journeys, and still other causes which I do not wish to mention, have perpetuated and increased this disarray. Everything that facilitates communication between nations, transmits not the virtues, but the crimes of each to the others, and in each one of them it alters the morals appropriate to its climate and the constitution of its government. So that the sciences have not done all of the harm; they have only had a considerable share in it; and the harm most specifically due to them is that they have given our vices a pleasing appearance, an air of honesty that keeps us from abominating them. When *The Villain* was first performed, I recall that people did not think that the play's title really fit the main character. Cleon seemed to be simply an ordinary man; he was, they said, like everyone else. This frightful scoundrel whose character is so thoroughly laid bare that everyone who has the misfortune of resembling him should have been made to shudder at himself, was judged to be an altogether unsuccessfully drawn character, and his darkest deeds were thought charming because men who looked upon themselves as very honest folk recognized themselves in him feature by feature.

abstractly, deserves all our admiration. The foolish science of men deserves nothing but derision and contempt.

[19] A taste for letters always heralds a beginning of corruption in a people, which it very rapidly accelerates. For, in an entire nation this taste can only arise from two sources, both of them bad, and both of which study in turn perpetuates and increases, namely idleness and a craving for distinction. In a well-constituted State, every citizen has his duties to fulfill; and he holds these important cares too dear to find leisure for frivolous speculations. In a well-constituted State all citizens are so thoroughly equal that none may enjoy precedence over others for being the most learned or even the most skilled, but at most for being the best: though this last distinction is often dangerous; for it makes for scoundrels and hypocrites.

[20] A taste for letters born of a craving for distinction necessarily engenders evils infinitely more dangerous than all the good they do is useful, in that those who yield to it eventually become quite unscrupulous about the means of success. The first Philosophers earned great renown by teaching men to perform their duties and the principles of virtue. But before long these precepts had become commonplaces, and in order to achieve distinction men had to strike out in opposite directions. Such is the origin of the absurd systems of men like Leucippus, Diogenes, Pyrrho, Protagoras, Lucretius. Men like Hobbes, *[966]* Mandeville and a thousand others have chosen to achieve distinction among us in the same way; and their dangerous teaching has borne so much fruit that, although we still have some true Philosophers eager to recall to our hearts the laws of humanity and of virtue, one is horrified to see how far the maxims of our ratiocinating century have carried the contempt for the duties of man and citizen.

[21] A taste for letters, philosophy, and the fine arts destroys the love of our primary duties and of true glory. Once talents preempt the honors owed to virtue, everyone wants to be an agreeable man, and no one cares to be a good man. This gives rise to the further inconsistency, that men are rewarded only for qualities which do not depend on them: for we are born with our talents, only our virtues belong to us.

[22] The first and almost the only care taken for our education is both the fruit and the seed of these ridiculous prejudices. For the sake of teaching us letters, we are made to suffer torments throughout our unhappy youth: we know all the rules of grammar before we ever hear any mention of man's duties: we know everything that has been done up to now before being told anything about what we should do; and as long as we are trained to prattle, nobody cares whether we know how to act or think. In a word, we are required to be learned only in things that can be of no use to us; and our children are brought up exactly like the athletes of the ancient public games who, because they dedicated their sturdy limbs to a useless and superfluous exercise, carefully avoided ever using them for any kind of productive work.

[23] A taste for letters, philosophy and the fine arts enervates bodies and souls. Work in the study causes men to grow frail, it weakens their temperament, and the soul's vigor is difficult to preserve once the body's vigor is lost. Study uses up the machine, exhausts minds, destroys strength, enervates courage, and this alone shows us clearly enough that it is not made for us: that is how men grow cowardly and pusillanimous, equally incapable of withstanding pain and the passions. Everyone knows how unfit city dwellers are to endure the toils of war, and the reputation of *[967]* men of letters as regards bravery is familiar enough.* And nothing is more justly suspect than an arrant coward's honor.

[24] So many reflections on the weakness of our nature often do no more than divert us from generous enterprises. The more we think about the miseries of mankind, the more our imagination oppresses us with their weight, and too much foresight deprives us of courage by depriving us of confidence. It is quite in vain that we strive to provide against unforeseen accidents "if science, trying to arm us with new defenses against natural discomforts,

* Here is a modern example for the benefit of those who accuse me of mentioning only ancient examples. The Republic of Genoa, looking for a way to subjugate the Corsicans more fully, found none more effective than to establish an Academy among them. I would have no difficulty expanding this Note, but to do so would be to insult the intelligence of the only Readers about whom I care.

has impressed our imagination more deeply with their magnitude and weight than with its own reasons or with the vain subtleties that lead us to seek cover behind it."

[25] A taste for philosophy loosens all the bonds of esteem and benevolence that tie men to society, and this is perhaps the most dangerous of the evils it engenders. The charm of study soon dulls all other attachments. What is more, continued reflection about mankind, continued observation of men, teach the Philosopher to judge them at their worth, and it is difficult to be particularly fond of what one holds in contempt. Before long he comes to focus on himself alone all the interest which virtuous men share with their fellows; his contempt for others heightens his pride: his vanity grows in direct proportion with his indifference to the rest of the universe. Family, fatherland, become for him words devoid of meaning: he is neither parent, nor citizen, nor man; he is a philosopher.

[26] At the same time, as the pursuit of the sciences as it were withdraws the philosopher's heart from the throng, it in other ways entangles the man of letters' heart in the throng, and in both cases it does so with equal prejudice to virtue. Anyone who cultivates the agreeable talents wants to please, to be admired, and indeed wants to be admired more than anyone else. Public applause is to be his alone: I *[968]* would say that he does everything to obtain it, if he did not do more to deprive his competitors of it. Hence arise, on the one hand, those refinements of taste and politeness, that vile and obsequious flattery, those seductive, insidious, puerile attentions which in time make for a petty soul and a corrupt heart; and, on the other hand, the jealousies, the rivalries, the well-known hatred of artists for one another, sly slander, deceit, treachery, and all the most cowardly and revolting aspects of vice. If the philosopher holds men in contempt, the artist soon causes them to hold him in contempt, and in the end both conspire to render them contemptible.

[27] There is more; and of all the truths I submitted to the judgment of the wise, this is the most arresting and the most cruel. All our Writers regard the crowning achievement of our century's politics to be the sciences, the arts, luxury, commerce,

laws, and all the other bonds which, by tightening the knots of society* among men through self-interest, place them all in a position of mutual dependence, impose on them mutual needs and common interests, and oblige everyone to contribute to everyone else's happiness in order to secure his own. These are certainly fine ideas, and they are presented in a favorable light. But when they are examined carefully and impartially, the advantages which they seem at first to hold out prove to be open to considerable criticism.

[28] It is quite a wonderful thing, then, to have placed men in a position where they cannot possibly live together without obstructing, supplanting, deceiving, betraying, destroying one another! From now on we must take care never to let ourselves be seen such as we are: because for every two men whose interests coincide, perhaps a hundred thousand oppose them, and the only way to succeed is either to deceive or to ruin all those people. That is the fatal source of the violence, the betrayals, the deceits and all the horrors necessarily required by a state of *[969]* affairs in which everyone pretends to be working for the others' profit or reputation, while only seeking to raise his own above them and at their expense.

[29] What have we gained from all this? Much babbling, rich people, and arguers, that is to say enemies of virtue and of common sense. In return we have lost innocence and morals. The multitude grovels in poverty; all are the slaves of vice. As yet uncommitted crimes already dwell deep inside men's hearts, and all that keeps them from being carried out is the promise of impunity.

[30] What a strange and ruinous constitution, where to have wealth always makes it easier to acquire more, and where he who has nothing finds it impossible to acquire something; where a good man has no way out of his misery; where the most knavish are the most honored, and where one necessarily has to

* I complain that Philosophy loosens the bonds of society formed by mutual esteem and goodwill, and I complain that the sciences, the arts and all the other objects of commerce tighten the bonds of society through self-interest. For it is indeed impossible to tighten one of these bonds without having the other relax by as much. There is therefore no contradiction here.

renounce virtue in order to become an honest man! I know that sermonizers have said all this a hundred times; but they were delivering sermons, whereas I give reasons; they perceived the evil, and I lay bare its causes and, above all, by showing that all these vices belong not so much to man, as to man badly governed, I point out something that is both most consoling and most useful.* *[970]*

[31] These are the truths I have expounded and tried to prove in the various Writings I have published on this subject. Here, now, are the conclusions I have drawn from them.

* I have noticed that at present a great many petty maxims hold sway in the world which seduce simple minds with a sham semblance of philosophy and are, besides, very handy for cutting off discussions in an authoritative and peremptory tone without having to consider the issue. One of them is: "Men are everywhere subject to the same passions; everywhere vanity and interest guide them; hence they are everywhere the same." When Geometricians make an assumption which, argument by argument, leads them to an absurd conclusion, they retrace their steps, and so prove the assumption false. The same method, applied to the maxim in question, would readily show its absurdity. But let us argue differently. A Savage is a man, and a European is a man. The half-philosopher immediately concludes that the one is no better than the other; but the philosopher says: in Europe the government, the laws, the customs, self-interest, everything places individuals under the necessity of deceiving one another, and of doing so incessantly; everything conspires to make vice a duty for them; they have to be wicked if they are to be wise, since there is no greater folly than to provide for the happiness of scoundrels at the expense of one's own. Among Savages self-interest speaks as insistently as it does among us, but it does not say the same things: love of society and care for their *[970]* common defense are the only bonds that unite them: the word *property,* that causes so many crimes among our honest folk, is, for them, almost devoid of meaning; discussions about a clash of interests simply do not arise among them; nothing leads them to deceive one another; public esteem is the only good to which everyone aspires and which they all deserve. It is perfectly possible that a Savage might commit a bad deed, but it is not possible that he will acquire the habit of doing evil, because to do so would profit him nothing. I believe that men's morals can be very accurately gauged by how much business they have with one another: the more dealings they have, the more they admire their talents and their industry, the more decorously and cunningly are they villains, and the more contemptible they are. I say it reluctantly: the good man is he who has no need to deceive anyone, and the Savage is that man.

He is not moved by the people's fasces, nor by the King's purple,
Nor by the discord that pits faithless brothers against one another;
Nor by Rome's affairs, nor by kingdoms doomed to fall. Neither does he
In his misery pity the poor, or envy the rich.

[32] Science is not suited to man in general. He forever goes astray in his quest for it; and if he sometimes does attain it, he almost always does so to his detriment. He is born to act and to think, not to reflect. Reflection only makes him unhappy without making him better or wiser: it causes him to regret past benefits and keeps him from enjoying the present: it shows him a happy future, so that his imagination might seduce and his desires torment him, and it shows him an unhappy future so that he might experience it ahead of time. Study corrupts his morals, affects his health, ruins his temperament, and often spoils his reason: even if it did teach him something, I would find that a rather poor compensation.

[33] I acknowledge that there are a few sublime geniuses capable of piercing the veils in which the truth wraps itself, a few privileged souls able to withstand the folly of vanity, base jealousy, and the other passions to which a taste for letters gives rise. The small number of those who have the good fortune of combining these qualities are the beacon and the honor of mankind; only they should properly engage in study for the good of all *[971]*, and this very exception confirms the rule; for if all men were Socrates, science would not harm them, but neither would they need it.

[34] Any people that has morals, and hence is respectful of its laws and free of any desire to improve on its traditional ways, must carefully guard against the sciences, and above all against men of science and learning whose sententious and dogmatic maxims would soon teach it to despise its ways and laws; which is something a nation can never do without being corrupted. The slightest change in customs, even if it is in some respects advantageous, invariably proves prejudicial to morals. For customs are the morality of the people; and as soon as it ceases to respect them, it is left with no rule but its passions, and no curb but the laws, which can sometimes keep the wicked in check, but can never make them good. Besides, once philosophy has taught the people to despise its customs, it soon learns to circumvent its laws. I therefore say that a people's morals are like a man's honor; they are a treasure to be preserved but

which, once lost, cannot be recovered.*

[35] But once a people is to a certain extent corrupted, should the sciences—regardless of whether they did or did not contribute to its corruption—be banished, or the people be shielded from them, either in order to improve it, or to keep it from becoming worse? This is another question about which I positively declared for the negative. For, in the first place, since *[972]* a vicious people never returns to virtue, the problem is not how to make good those who no longer are so, but how to keep good those who are fortunate enough to be so. In the second place, the same causes that have corrupted peoples, sometimes help prevent a greater corruption; thus, a man who has ruined his temperament by an injudicious use of medicines, is forced to continue to rely on doctors in order to stay alive; and that is how the arts and sciences, after fostering the vices, become necessary in order to keep them from turning into crimes; they at least coat them with a varnish which prevents the poison from being exuded quite so freely. They destroy virtue, but preserve its public semblance,** and that is at least a fine thing to do. They introduce politeness and propriety in its stead, and for the fear of appearing wicked they substitute the fear of appearing ridiculous.

* I find in history a single, but a striking example that seems to contradict this maxim: the founding of Rome by a troop of bandits whose descendants within a few generations became the most virtuous people that ever was. I would have no difficulty explaining this fact if this were the place to do so; but I will leave it at pointing out that the founders of Rome were not so much men whose morals were corrupt as men whose morals had not yet been formed: they did not despise virtue, rather, they did not yet know it; for the words *virtues* and *vices* are collective notions which arise only in the intercourse between men. Besides, the example of Rome lends no support to the case for the sciences: for the two first Kings of Rome, who gave the Republic form and instituted its customs and morals, were concerned, the one with nothing but wars, the other with nothing but sacred rites; the two things in the world that are at the farthest remove from philosophy.

** This semblance consists in a certain gentleness of morals which sometimes makes up for their lack of purity, a certain appearance of order which averts frightful confusion, a certain admiration for fine things which prevents good things from being entirely forgotten. Vice here puts on the mask of virtue not as hypocrisy does, in order to deceive and to betray, but rather in order to escape, behind this pleasing and sacred effigy, its horror at itself when it sees itself naked.

[36] My opinion, as I have already said more than once, therefore is to keep and even carefully to support Academies, Colleges, Universities, Libraries, Spectacles and all the other amusements that might to some extent distract men's wickedness, and prevent them from spending their idleness in more dangerous pursuits. For in a land where honest folk and good morals no longer count, it would still be preferable to live among scoundrels than among bandits.

[37] Now I ask, where is the contradiction, when I cultivate tastes the progress of which I approve? It is no longer a matter of getting people to do good, but only of distracting them from doing evil; they have to be kept busy with trifles to keep them from evil deeds; they have to be entertained rather than sermonized. If my Writings have edified the few good [people], then I have done them all the good it was in my power to do, and perhaps it is further useful to them to have the other people provided with objects that distract and *[973]* keep them from thinking about them. I would count myself most happy to have a Play a day hissed, if at that price I could keep the evil intentions of but a single one of its Spectators in check for two hours, and save the honor of his friend's daughter or wife, the secret of those who have confided in him, or the fortune of his creditor. When morals are no more, one has to think exclusively in terms of the polity; and it is well enough known that Music and Theater are among its most important concerns.

[38] If my justification leaves some difficulties unresolved, I frankly dare say that it does so not with regard to the public or to my adversaries, but with regard to myself alone: for only by examining myself can I decide whether I belong among the few, and whether my soul can bear the burden of literary pursuits. I have sensed their danger more than once; I have more than once given them up with the intention of never taking them up again, and in renouncing their seductive charm, I sacrificed to my peace of heart the only pleasures that could still delight it. If in the weariness that overcomes me, if at the end of a difficult and painful life, I have dared to take them up again for a few more moments in order to relieve my suffering, I at least believe that I have not become so interested or involved

in them as to deserve on their account the just reproofs I have leveled at men of letters.

[39] I needed a test in order to achieve full self-knowledge, and I did not hesitate to perform that test. Once I knew how my soul reacted to literary success, it remained for me to see how it would react to setbacks. I now know, and I can openly state the worst. My Play suffered the fate which it deserved and which I anticipated; but except for its boring me, I left the performance much more satisfied with myself, and with better reason to be so, than if it had succeeded.

[40] I therefore advise those who are so eager to find things to reproach me with, to be prepared to study my principles and to observe my conduct more carefully before they tax them with contradiction and incoherence. If they ever see that I start currying the public's favor, or that it flatters my vanity to have composed pretty songs, or that I blush to have written poor Plays, or that I seek to undermine my rivals' fame, or that I come to speak ill of the great *[974]* men of the age in order to raise myself to their level by lowering them to mine, or that I aspire to positions in Academies, or that I dance attendance on the women who set the tone, or that I fawn on the foolishness of the Great, or that, no longer wishing to live by the work of my hands, I become contemptuous of the craft I have chosen and strike out in quest of wealth, in a word if they notice that the love of reputation causes me to forget the love of virtue, I beg them to warn me, even publicly, and I promise instantly to commit my Writings and my Books to the flames, and to concede all the errors they may wish to reproach me with.

[41] In the meantime I shall write Books, compose Poems and Music, if I have the talent, the time, the strength and the will to do so: I shall continue to state openly the bad opinion in which I hold letters and those who practice them,* and to

* I am amazed at how confused most men of letters have been in this affair. When they saw the sciences and arts under attack, they took it personally, whereas all of them could, without any self-contradiction, hold the same view I do, that while these things have done society great harm, it is now essential to use them against the harm they have done, as one does a medication or those noxious insects that have to be crushed on their bite. In a word, there is not a

believe that I am not worth any the less for it. True, people may some day say: This avowed enemy of the sciences and arts nevertheless wrote and published Plays; and I admit that that discourse will be a most bitter satire, not on myself, but on my century.

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single man of letters who, if his conduct can pass the test in the preceding paragraph, could not say on his own behalf what I say on mine; and it seems to me that an argument along these lines suits them particularly since, between us, they care very little about the sciences as long as they continue to cause scholars to be honored. They are like pagan priests, who valued religion only as long as it caused them to be respected.

PREFACE TO *NARCISSUS*, pages 96–111

Rousseau wrote this "Preface" in the winter of 1752–1753, and published it soon thereafter together with the text of the *Narcissus, or The Self-Lover.*

Narcissus is the earliest of several plays he wrote or sketched as a young man (*Confessions* III, *OC* I: 120). None of them was performed at the time. In 1742 or 1743 he showed the *Narcissus* to the great playwright Marivaux (1688–1763), who "touched it up" (*Confessions* VII, *OC* I: 287). Rousseau continued, in later years, to write at least fragments of plays, tales and allegories, and musical entertainments. He composed his best known opera, *Le Devin du village* or *The Village Soothsayer,* early in 1752, at a time when the public debate about the *First Discourse* was still very intense. It was performed before the Court to considerable acclaim in October of that year. The king wanted to reward Rousseau with a pension. Rousseau declined it by not appearing at the ceremony at which it was to be awarded him. The reasons for his action were many and complex, but the fear that, as the beneficiary of royal favors, he might no longer feel perfectly free to speak his mind on the most important issues, or that others might impugn his motives for what he said or did, certainly played an important part in his decision. He had long ago decided to live free and poor, and he remained faithful to that resolve. Diderot and others of his friends remonstrated with him for it (*Confessions* VIII, *OC* I: 374–381).

In the wake of the success enjoyed by the *Devin du village,* the youthful *Narcissus* was brought out of its drawer and produced. The premiere took place on December 18, 1752. Although he apparently did not think much of the play, Rousseau rightly judged the "Preface" which he now wrote for it to be one of his better writings, adding that in it "I began to reveal my principles a little more than I had done up to that time" (*Confessions* VIII, *OC* I: 388). In the immediate sequel he goes on to say that he developed these principles fully in his next major writing, the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,* the theme for which was announced that very year, 1753.

This "Preface" is Rousseau's last major published contribution to the controversy most immediately aroused by the *First Discourse.* His next major public statements on the issues which he had first raised in that *Discourse* are the *Letter to d'Alembert* (1758), and the "Prefaces" to the *Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761).

The standard contemporary edition of the "Preface" is that by Jacques Scherer, in the Pléiade *Oeuvres complètes* II: 959–974.

[1] I wrote this Play at the age of eighteen He wrote it in his early twenties: "I lied by a few years" (*Confessions* III, *OC* I: 120).

[3]* the four German sermons of which one begins Rousseau paraphrases almost without parody the beginning of a speech by Johann Friedrich Burscher delivered in 1752 "in defense of learning and the fine arts, against Mr. Rousseau of Geneva" on the occasion of the birthday of the king of Saxony. For the full text of this and the other speeches delivered on that occasion, see Tente, *Die Polemik, op. cit.*, pp. 458–547.

[3] In the *Mercure* for August 1752** See the introductory editorial note on the "Letter about a new Refutation," p. 322 above.

[9] *glibness enough, not enough wisdom* *Satis loquentiae, sapientae parum.* According to the Roman grammarian Aulus Gellius (*c.* 165–123 B.C.), that is how the grammarian Valerius Probus understood Sallust's (86–34 B.C.) remark (in *The Catiline Conspiracy* V: 4) "enough eloquence, too little wisdom," *satis eloquentiae, sapientiae parum* (*Attic Nights* I: 15, 18). I am indebted to my colleague Professor Michael Roberts for this reference.

[15]* *"The Villain"* The play *Le Méchant* by the former Jesuit Jean Baptiste Louis Gresset, written in 1745 and first performed in 1747.

[20] the absurd systems of men like Leucippus Leucippus (fl. 450–420 B.C.) originated the atomic theory. **Diogenes** Called The Cynic (4th century B.C.), he was notorious for the extremes to which he went in leading a life of utter independence. **Pyrrho** of Elis (c. 365–c. 275 B.C.) was the founder of skepticism. **Protagoras** of Abdera (c. 480–411 B.C.), the most famous and successful of the Sophists, best remembered for his dictum "man is the measure of all things." T. **Lucretius** Carus (99–55 B.C.), Roman follower of the materialist and hedonist Epicurus, he was the author of the didactic poem *On the Nature of Things.* Thomas **Hobbes** (1588–1679), the great English political philosopher whose teaching frequently has been and is taken to be strictly materialist and atheist. Bernard **Mandeville** (1670–1733), author of *The Fable of the Bees,* subtitled *Private Vices, Publick Benefits.*

[23]* Here is a modern example. . . . The Republic of Genoa More

precisely, the Corsican Academy, or Academy of Bastia, was restored in 1749 by the Marquis de Cursay, commanding general of the French troops charged with pacifying Corsica on behalf of Genoa, and he manifestly did try to revive the Academy for the very reasons Rousseau here mentions. Rousseau wrote his *Discourse on the Virtue most Necessary in Heroes* (*OC* II: 1262–1274) for the Corsican Academy's 1751 prize essay competition; however, he decided not to submit it. He thought it very poor, and never published it.

[24] "if science, trying to arm us . . . seek cover behind it" Montaigne, "Of Physiognomy," *Essays* III: 12 (*OC* 1016, Frame tr. 795). The adjective "vain" in the last line was added by Rousseau.

[30]* *He is not moved by the people's fasces . . .*

> *Illum non populi fasces, non purpura Regum*
> *Flexit, et infidos agitans discordia fratres;*
> *Non res Romanae, perituraque regna. Neque ille*
> *Aut doluit miserans inopem, aut invidit habenti.*
>
> —Vergil, *Georgics,* 495f, 498f

[32] He is born to act and to think, not to reflect. In a striking passage of his next major writing, Rousseau will say "If [Nature] destined us to be healthy then, I almost dare assert, the state of reflection is a state against Nature, and the man who meditates a depraved animal." *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men* I [9], p. 145 above.

[34]* the two first Kings of Rome Romulus and Numa. "The name *Rome* which is said to come from *Romulus* is Greek, and means *force;* the name *Numa* is also Greek, and means *Law.* Is it not odd that the first two Kings of that city should in anticipation have borne names so appropriate to what they did?" *Social Contract* IV: 4, n.

[39] I needed a test The *Devin du village* had been very successful, and Rousseau later described his feelings of pleasure at its first performance; yet the next day he refused the offer of a royal pension. He may well have exaggerated the lack of success of the *Narcissus* in order to dramatize his equanimity in the face of failure as much as of success.